Basic Nutrition for Better Bike Riding

Eat Right - Fuel the Machine!

From Tera Liescheidt, R.D.,

One of the best things about riding your bike is that you get a free pass to eat what you want, right? Well, sort of. You can definitely consume more calories, but the right eating plan will give you energy, help you feel better, fuel your body more efficiently and help you lose weight, if that is your goal.

Whole Grain Bread

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The best eating plan for a cyclist is one that includes plenty of low fat, high carbohydrate foods to provide energy and fluids to offer hydration. While 'carb' is a four letter word to many dieters, they are certainly not the diet-wrecking evil food that some people might lead you to believe. Carbs are your body's preferred source of energy for cycling. Since you are constantly burning carbs to fuel your cycling as well as daily activities, you must regularly replace them with a high carbohydrate diet.

The kind of carbs that give all carbs a bad reputation are those made with simple sugars and refined flours. These offer little nutritional value. Get your fill of carbohydrates through fruits, vegetables, beans, and whole grain breads, rice and pasta. Round out your diet with lean protein and a small amount of fat.

When you eat is almost as important as what you eat. About an hour before a ride, fuel up with a high carbohydrate snack or small meal. Some ideas might be fresh fruit and whole grain toast or a half whole wheat bagel with peanut butter.

If your ride is longer than 60 minutes, you'll need to refuel with more carbs. Researchers recommend about 30 to 40 grams of carbohydrate each 30 minutes you ride beyond the first 60 minutes. This might be a good time to consider a sports drink or energy bar. Eating a high carb snack or meal within 60 minutes after a lengthy ride is important to replenish your body and prepare you for your next ride.

Cyclists must make a conscious effort to drink fluids before, during and after riding to stay hydrated. Becoming dehydrated is one of the worst things that can happen to you and so it is important to be proactive and push lots of fluids, even before you feel thirsty. You'll want to drink at least 8 - 12 ounces of fluid immediately before a ride, another 8 ounces every half hour during a ride, and enough when you're finished to gradually replenish those lost fluids after a ride.